

NEON NOW!

Discussions on the use of neon
in Australia.

By
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This paper fulfills part of
the course requirements for:

BACHELOR OF ARTS,
[VISUAL]

GLASS WORKSHOP,
Canberra School of Art,
Canberra, Australia.
1987.

CONTENTS.

- Page 1. Preface - a personal introduction.
- Page 3. A Brief History of Neon in Australia, as seen by Bill Livingstone.
- Page 9. Warren Langley, a discussion on his work.
- Page 15. Neil Roberts, a personal approach.
- Page 24. Appendix one, A brief explanation of the neon process.
- Page 26 Appendix two, Slide index.

PREFACE.

I chose to do my paper on neon because it is such a lively, exciting medium. I have been interested in neon for quite some time. I remember looking at the glowing illuminated city at night and just loving it. Then, in 1984, I began realising neon in an artistic form when I entered the Canberra School of Art, and even more so at the 1985 AUSGLASS Conference. ^{A Neon-Light} This workshop was given by Neil Roberts, one of the artists included in this paper. My contact with Neil, as a student and peer, has spanned my four years at Art School. I approached Neil when I needed information on how to set up neon. He supplied me with tubes and a transformer for my first instillation, in 1985.

I also interviewed Bill Livingstone, with whom I have had brief contact with since the Light Workshop in 1985. Bill is a tube bender who I approached when I wanted some tubes pumped. (This didn't eventuate, as my blowing skills were not advanced enough.)

The third person I chose to interview was Warren Langley. I have been aware of his work with neon for some time. I particularly chose Warren because he is involved in using neon in an architectural format, which is an important direction that seems to be expanding.

I decided to use the interview format as I wanted the information to be easy to read and absorb. It is straight forward and hopefully puts across some of the character of the people involved.

There is a lack of information on Australian neon, apart from the occasional magazine article, so this paper goes some way towards bridging the gap. I am sure that Bill, Warren and Neil would be more than happy to pass on more information if required.

I am very glad I did this paper. My communication skills have improved through talking to these

professionals and I have also learnt alot about the artists and there work with NEON.

I would just like to give a BIG NEON HALO to all involved in producing this paper. Bill, Warren and Neil. Klaus - for his library, Jackie - for the touch-typing, Jim - for the mega effort, and my walkman.

This paper is a presentation of neon in the eightys, discussing three areas; Commercial, Artistic and Architectural. I interviewed people working in each of these three areas.

Bill Livingstone, is a "Glass Bender" working for Adam Neon, a Sydney commercial neon company. Bill has been making neon advertising signs for fifteen years, and during the last five years he has been producing neon for artists and architects. He talks about the changes in neon through the decades, from the first signs in the early thirtys through to the direction neon is taking in the eightys and ninetys, as well as his increased interaction with artists.

Neil Roberts, a Queanbeyan based artist, has been using neon in his work since 1982. From his early instillations at the Canberra School of Art to his more recent commisioned work, Neil is one of a few Australian artists working in neon today.

Another such artist is Warren Langley, a glass artist based in Sydney. Warren seperates his work into three areas. Production work, What he calls "REAL" work (work with a personal statement), and Architectural work.

This paper presents discussions with these three, giving three different outlooks on neon in Australia.

A Brief History of Neon in Australia,
As seen by Bill Livingstone.

(M.B.), What was the early history of neon signs in Australia?

(B.L.), In 1927 neon signs began being imported from America and England and in 1933-34 neon was taking over from electric lightbulb signs. One of the first major neon companies in Australia was developed by two men from Claude Neon in America. They brought glass benders out from the U.S.A. and set up business. Other small neon companies started, who were very creative and proud of their individuality. This was the period of Art Deco and the companies had their own designers, tube benders and signwriters. The signwriters did all the artwork behind the neon tubes; often bright boxes or black with the letter style being an integral part of the sign. The overlapping colours were highly important for the visual effect of the sign, from the small sign in a shop window to a sign on a four story building. There were no high-rise buildings at this time. There were alot of signs on buildings around the Circular Quay area. The signs were quite decorative. Neon was also being used as outlines around theatres and arcades as architects started to realise the potential of the new medium.

Unfortunately, the signs of the 1930's are almost non-existant. (See slides for re-creations.) Melbourne has a few original signs from the 1930's and the National Trust has these as a symbol of architectural industrial importance.

Neon then progressed to the stage where everyone could afford a sign in their shop, even though most were leased. The shopkeeper would place a deposit and would

lease the sign for five years. The lease covered maintainance and replacement in the case of damage.

The Second World War stopped all neon manufacture. Signs were not allowed to be lit. Maintainance was stopped and shop windows were not allowed to be illuminated. Anything that was remotely power consuming or identifiable by the enemy was not allowed. Most of the glass benders dissappeared or went to war. Most were quite young as training had only started in the late 1930's. With the conclusion of the war there was a slow progression back to the neon sign.

When did neon signs begin to reappear?

My first recollection of signs after the war was about 1950. I would see old signs being pulled down, then reappearing a couple of weeks later, fully restored. Claude Neon, Consolidated Neon and other small companies started leasing signs and making signs with longer durability. Instead of painting the box the signs sat on, they started using baked enamel. The signs lost some of their decorative effect but they would last much longer. Cleaning and maintainance was a lot easier as the older paint would often be damaged if scrubbed too hard.

During the fiftys and sixtys there was a resurgence of neon. Not as glamorous as the art deco forms of the thirtys but more simplistic, following the style of the fiftys. Art is reflected in neon of that era. Instead of a highly decorative box to hold the neon, you had a slick simple rounded box or curved shape.

When did plastic signs start appearing?

The first plastic signs, with fluorescent tube inside plastic risen letters on a plastic base, started to

appear in the late sixtys. The plastic sign was quick to replace. There was no external tube, as in neon signs, so it was not as easily damaged. Plastic signs almost took over from neon by the late seventys. Companies had stopped training glass benders and, where possible, would sell plastic signs in preference.

Were plastic signs cheaper to make?

They were cheaper to produce, but ,in the end, their longevity was not as good. The tubes often blew and and the perspex started to crack.

What started the return of neon?

In the mid seventys art directors, designers and artists started using it again in gallery displays and films. Stephen Spielberg used it in a movie called 1941. They had huge neon signs which trucks went crashing through. In the eightys it was used in Bladerunner. Neon was seen as an artform in this film, with degradation and deterioration all around these huge glowing, buzzing signs.

Neon was making a resurgence. It had a feeling of mystery around it. People had not forgotten about it. Then the occasional shop got one and there would be row after row of plastic signs, with one glowing neon, which would really stand out. Neon was becoming a status symbol - everybody had to have one. Neon was returning. Where there had once been neon, then plastic, the plastic signs were being pulled down and replaced with neon.

By the late seventys the industry was very short of glass benders. The older men were retiring. They had been very regimented and had a strict way of doing things. Small companies were starting up, which was good for artists, as often the traditional guys could not see past neon for the use of signs.

Architects were also becoming interested in neon, not for commercial use but use internally. At first they were wary of the gasses and wireing involved but now this is accepted and neon is being used in a big way.

For example, the Darling Harbour Project is using alot of neon. Terrifying objects - by terrifying I mean massive - are being put up. The Powerhouse Museum is also utilising neon, but in a more nostalgic way. The Orpheum Theatre in Cremorne (Sydney) is redoing the internal and external lighting of the theatre, back to the neonized art deco period of the thirtys, with neon running around the facade of the building and running inside as well. Other cinemas will most likely follow suit.

At the moment we are training more benders to work on the big jobs, like Darling Harbour. They are using very large, very descriptive forms, like huge milkshakes.

With the return of the popularity of neon, do you see it imitating any particular period?

I see it as coming back in a decorative form, unlike the very severe form of the sixties. We are working on incredible structures and forms now, rather than the part plastic - part neon signs of the sixtys. There were so many "no vacancy", and "not open" signs. I made stacks of "no"s once.

It must be alot more satisfying to you, making wild structures instead of hundreds of "no"s.

Yes, it is, but it has never been a boring medium. I am interested in all aspects of neon. The preservation, the history, the artistic use, the commercial use and so on. Unfortunately it is too late for many pieces, but I have encouraged people to appreciate it. I've also

become more introspective of people who are interested in it and I consider the people who are using it in its correct perspective. A lot of people see it as a pure advertising form, but it is a decorative, architectural, sculptural form in itself and as a sculptural form for the creative artist to utilise it with whatever medium, far beyond what I can see.

Are you having alot more interaction with artists?

Artists have slipped into the background. Maybe they are daunted by its qualities. I mean it is quite an intense medium. You have to get slightly hooked to appreciate it. Anybody that is an artist can appreciate this. People like Brian Hirst, Warren Langley and Neil Roberts understand it, and are now maturing and using neon differently from the beginning. Warren, for example, is using neon in more subtle ways. In the beginning things were pretty brash.

Later this century you will see some magnificent applications, and I hope it is used as a decorative, not just artistic, form. It is highly important that it is utilised in as many possible ways where it can contribute to the landscape. It was once almost a jarring, ugly part of the landscape.

So, if it is used in a more architectural manner, will it fit into the landscape?

Yes if used for subtle highlights, where the neon is partly concealed.

Are there any certain colours for commercial use?

Fluorescent powders came in after the war and became popular. All the beautiful colours from the old style clear tubes dissappeared. The beautiful blues, ruby colors, marine green, yellows, vibrant oranges and reds, and deep intense purples were very alive, where as the fluorescent coatings of tubing are interesting, but not as exciting , as far as I'm concerned.

For commercial signs it seems red is very popular?

It goes through stages of people using turquoise, greens and red. Red is a durable colour because it doesn't fade. Every conceivable colour is used, alot of bright pink is used these days, and watermelon "yuppie colors".

Do you think the neon used in each decade reflects the society?

Yes, very much so. It reflects the artform and ideas of the period. As I have said, the thirtys was naieve, very sweet supressed signs. In the sixtys big signs went up, then the corporation signs of the seventys, with very little use of creativity - an insult to the medium really.

(see slides for examples of early neon.)

WARREN LANGLEY.

A DISCUSSION ON HIS WORK,
PARTICULARLY HIS ARCHITECTURAL COMMISSIONS.

(M.B.), How did you start working with neon?

(W.L.), It was an extension of my two dimensional work in stained glass. I wanted the ultimate line, which is of course the illuminated line. The only thing more intense than a neon line was a lazer line, which was a lot less practicle. I found I not draw or paint a line of this intensity and I was able to get a warm sensitivity in my work through the use of neon.

What problems do you come up against, working in neon?

It is fashionable. I also worry about the gimmickry of it - the same way that anyone in glass is confronted by the same thing. How often do we make something and its only merit is thats it's made of glass? The only thing of interest is the glass. The exact same thing arises when working with neon. It is such an attractive line that one must be critical, it isn't the only merit it has. This is a dilemma faced by people working in neon.

Is this a common problem?

Yes, for everyone who uses neon. I don't know if everyone is aware of it at the moment. There is a huge rush by Sydney students to use neon in their shows. In many instances it's neon for the sake of neon, not really relevant to the piece. I don't doubt that it enhances the piece, that's the nature of neon, but just how

important is it to the intergrated whole? It's difficult to deal with sometimes.

How long have you been using neon?

Since 1980. My use has changed to a more minimalist sense. Neon is a small componant now - before it was a major componant, the dominant thing. Now, in my architectural commisions, there is only a little fillagree that creeps around the edge of something. Only its presence is highlighted.

Do you incorporate neon in most of your architectural commissions?

No. If I had my way I probably wouldn't use neon in any of them, because neon was part of my work in 1980 -81 -82. My exhibition pieces all contained neon. With commissioned architectural work it's the architects that want the neon, not particularly me.

Does it worry you, having to do what other people tell you in these cases?

Because you are designing to a brief, you push your art content as far as you can. But if they want a neon piece, well, I can say 'no, I don't want the job'; I can try and talk them round or I can say 'yes, I'll do a neon piece'. If it wasn't for the fact that the architects wanted it, I would probably use less neon than I am. But still, if it is incorporated properly it can be a very appropriate touch.

Do you enjoy the commissioned work, working within a frame-work?

I do enjoy working within a brief. It pushes your intellect; pushes the limits of your imagination because, just when you have a fabulous idea, it doesn't fit. It can't be hung, or the wall won't take the load. There is often something that will step up and stop the process. The nice part about commissioned work, provided you keep it separate from your other work, is working within that constraint, you learn to love it. You can't see it as a stifling thing or you will go crazy. It tests your skills and intellect. It's like learning to love your mistakes, they will give you new tangents to go off on. You have to like that aspect of working on a brief, and you have to keep it very separate from your other work.

Do you think there is a wider use of neon in architectural work?

Maybe there is more work around, but this could be a false impression nearly because I have been on the scene long enough and have enough contacts. But I think there is. Maybe the architects are becoming more enlightened in this area of neon. I don't think there is a monster rush towards the use of neon, I just think some of the architects I've worked with like it. It is relevant to their style of architecture. Neon is very flexible. Lately I have been working on the tubes, painting them. This has changed the whole nature of the line. It's no longer a single linear line, now it's a linear collage of colour. This pushes it into different architectural spaces, really jazz patterned, post modernist - whatever you want to call them - situations. Maybe a fine line of neon looks no good in these spaces, yet a brightly collaged neon unit would look more at home. Then maybe the neon itself is becoming more versatile as we look more at doing things to it.

There is a place in Belconnen called Billboard. They spent four or five thousand dollars on neon for the roof in large swirly designs in pinks, blues and white. Now they have found they can't use it as people feel uncomfortable with the brightness. This could be dulled with paint. Surely the sign company should do this, or realise it. Or do they just make the pieces?

The companies working in neon in Australia are among the most unimaginative human beings, because they still think that neon is only good for signage. Even when we take our componants in to be made-up, they are facinated by what we are doing with it - but they don't push it. Because they are a huge marketing enterprise, they could be out there doing good things with neon, and there-by upping business by turning people on to it. They are locked into a style of neon.

Are they locked into this style because they are basically production orientated?

I think that's the reason. In a commercial factory situation, you end up with lack of motivation because your geared to the market-place. They're not interested or enlightened enough (particularly in Australia) to do much experimentation. They'd much rather play it safe and make there money. They need more interaction with artists and that seems to be happening.

When I was in Sydney last, I noticed neon incorporated into lights and telephones. It's moving away from neon in a sign format.

Melbourne is a more exciting place for contemporary neon. Lots of areas in Melbourne have interesting spots

of neon.

In Tokyo I walked through the city specifically looking for new interior spaces to see if they were using neon. They weren't using much of it, suprisingly. But what became obvious to me was these really avant garde interior spaces. They were totally sculptural environments, That's what's lacking in the Sydney situation. I've got architects crying 'There are no interior decorators in Sydney'- who are capable of dealing with these really quite avante garde commercial interiors. They are all the rage in New York and London at the moment, dealing with surface treatments, textures, finishes and distortions of form. Some of the shops in Tokyo are outrageous. It's like walking into a Jules Verne submarine set, quite bizarre. They were wonderful, all sorts of exciting use of light and material - lots of concrete - a lot of relivance to architecture and interiors. There has been a whole revolution in lighting in the past twenty years, what with the advent of halogen lights and light fittings. Light fittings were once always a certain size for no other reason than that you had to have a globe in them. Now, with globes the size of a fingernail, a light fitting no longer has to be twenty centimetres across. Now it can be forty millimeters.

Architects have come to realise what a wonderful source of light neon is for recess linear lighting. You will walk into a building and there will be a fine glowing line that runs along the walls. When you look underneath this recess you will realise that it has come from a long narrow tube, bent to follow the architectural surface. Fluorescent tubes have never been long enough for this. A whole new usage for neon has opened up . Use of neon is moving away from signs into art-works and actual lighting.- concealed and subtle use.

Who is using neon artistically today?

A lot of students. A few people are using neon in a similar to Neil Roberts - more for instillation projects. This area interests me.

Now I tend to use neon only when I'm asked to. I used neon six years ago. It was a little newer then. Now there are lots of people who use it. While I was, by no means, the first person to use it - I'm not suggesting that - at that time it was a little newer, more exciting than six years down the line.

Is that just because you used it six years ago, or are more people using neon today?

I think it's because more people are using it now. There has also been a resurgence back to neon for commercial use.

I'm a colourist, that's what my works about. I'm interested in bizarre colour combinations.

Is that why you like neon?

Yes, I guess so. Maybe I'm just cheap and flashy.

Slides of work included.

NEIL ROBERTS,
A PERSONAL APPROACH.

(M.B.), What first prompted you to use neon?

(N.R.), I can't pinpoint it. I can't credit it to an exhibition or a work I saw. There must have been something that initially said 'I feel I can deal with that.' Before I started working in glass I did photography for a couple of years and I feel the common thread is a sense of light and the use of light. That's what my photography was about.

I've seen some of your long exposure, night photos - did you start with these before you started with neon?

A little bit. Since I got into glass I've dismissed the photography that I'd done. I dismissed the black-and-white stuff as something quite different. I look back at the negs and prints and find the major preoccupation with shadows. Light has always been important.

Did you start working with glass before neon?

Yes, I started with glass blowing. I saw a glass blower in 1976, moved to Adelaide and worked as a trainee glass blower at the Jam Factory for eighteen months. I then visited collages and studios. I went to Sweden to study with Orefors. At that point I was only just beginning to understand any vocabulary about the vessel or skill of glass blowing.

When I came back from Sweden I came back to a residency at Sydney College of the Arts, and I can't remember what it was there, but during that time I

actually went to a couple of companies, trying to discuss neon, in a very non-specific way.

Did you find these companies helpful?

When I did speak to them, I found I was incompetent in communicating in their language. I had no understanding of the processes involved, so the questions I asked were either un-realistic or ridiculously simple, so I got a response, although I was not on the same plane.

I then went to the New York Experimental Glass Workshop for a four week summer school in neon. David Ablon, an American neon artist, was the teacher there. I returned to Sydney. Six months later I moved to Canberra and a job at the Canberra School of Art. I started using the "YES" in instillations around the school.

What colour was the "YES"?

The "YES" was blue, it was really beautiful. I broke it when I moved to Queanbeyan. Yeh, I really liked that, it was such an affirmation, I really liked the word. And then late 83, Oct 83, that was the first year I was here, I did the piece that I regard as bit of a breakthrough the one out in the wall, the broken jagged glass coming out of the wall with the concealed mirror and tube coming out from behind it, that worked better than I imagined. (see slide)

Why do you use blue?

Because the quality of the plate glass through a broken edge, I find, is completely enhanced by the blue, so that the colour of the glass enhances the colour of the tube and visa versa . That's not to say that some interesting effects could not happen using a different

colour, generally I feel the tones work off one another than against one another. Also I find the clear blue, the mercury argon blue to be the most ethereal of the neon colours that I have ready access to. I mean there are some really nice colours, fluro colours that companys have, but they are a little more specialised, they are not the sort of thing that you can describe over the phone, they're not standard.

And they would be more expensive to get?

No I dont think so. I dont think the fluro colours are more expensive, If they are it would be only \$5 or \$10.

Do you find a big difference between the ones that you call actual works and other ones that might be more spontaneous, like the instillation you did in the carpark in Melbourne?

No, I think the only reason I tend to dismiss those ones is because I dont think that they were particularly sucessful, like the carpark one. That one was a fairly spontaneous work.

Was it blue?

No, it was white. But I just don't feel that they were the strongest pieces that I have done. Like those down in Melbourne were those I feel didn't use the neon too well. I used it too overtly or something, I liked the one in the mound. I like the possibility of that one.

Is that in sawdust?

Yes, it was garden woodchips. It was a found pile of sawdust and garden chips. I think it needed more neon. It needed to be two lines, rather than just two neons. So that the line actually followed the contour of the mound. I like the idea of having something concealed, that merges; the transition of things emerging, and neon is really good for that.

Did you have problems with daylight and seeing the neon tubes?

Yes, because it is over powered by daylight. Generally you can't see neon effectively in daylight. But then it emanates at night, its not like a spot light or any other light source, it has that emanation around it that I think can be really utilised, rather than the line itself, or as much as the line itself. You can use the atmosphere around the tube. I think thats what the ones with the concealed tube and the glass over the top do - use the atmosphere, it directs that through the glass.

The radiating effect?

I think that's what the one in Knives and Shadows achieves.(see slide) Even though it doesn't come out in photos. It just dispersed the light.

Is that where you put the broken glass on top of the neon tube?

Yes, the broken windscreen glass sprinkled over the top. And then again in New Zealand, where I did some

instillations. One had a mound of stuff over the glass. It had piles and piles of windscreen glass, so that the tubes were really suppressed, and it was only their light travelling through.

So you couldn't really see that there was actually neon tubes under the glass?

You could, because I also used lots of other clear glass tubes, unlit tubes, so it was like a graphic line. It was working with the broken pieces of glass, but then also with hard edged bits of broken clear tube. And then interspersed were bits of lit tube so that the light was diffused through all the glass, not just the lit areas.

When you work now do you think 'okay, I want to use neon'?

No, I never have, Mikki. I couldn't tell you when the next time I use neon will be.

Some work I'm thinking of doing is an extension of the 1984 Knives and Shadows exhibition. The central knife had the cracked image in the thick opera house glass and at some stage I was experimenting in the corner over there with neon tubes on the edge of the glass, then concealing it, so that the light travels into the crack and lights it up. I wouldn't mind working with something like that - and that bit of printed glass I had here with the bitumen print on it. Building up layers of cracked glass with the light in it and bitumen prints on top. But I never rarely consider using a piece of neon with this idea.

Is neon just an element that appears?

Its part of the way things are constructed. I mean I suppose I think about things fairly obviously. When I think about things, like at Bitumen River or like the one over at Gorman House, I guess I have to set certain limitations. I have to say 'okay I am going to work with particular materials,' otherwise the field would be wide open. I could do anything So, at least by saying that I am going to explore glass and neon in a public place I give myself a certain frame of reference to work in.

Have you got any feed back on the two
installations, Gorman House and Gallery Three (the old
Bituman River)?

Only a few people have seen the one at Gorman House. Its my overall pattern of working, that my ambitions aren't clear. So I don't have a clear ambition to be a neon artist or a glass artist.

You shouldn't have to be categorised anyway.

No, but that also reflects that I don't have really clear or concise ambitions about what the next body of work is that I am going to produce. Just because I work with neon doesn't mean that I automatically think of my next piece in terms of neon. So sometimes that means I am not prolific. I don't think that I am a prolific artist, I sort of work through something, and then there will be a little burst, like what has happened this month with the Gorman House and the Bitumen River commissions. There is burst of things, and then things crystalise. And often neon appears at those points, rather than in anticipation. I don't anticipate what materials I am going to use,

I look at neon as an energy source because you can turn it off and turn it on. That's one of the parallels between neon and myself. I am really attracted to the red.

You really like the red, don't you.

Yes, it's a really strong colour. I can see why you use the blue, and why it works for you. I think that you have to be very careful because red can get really tacky. Neon is like a life-source to me.

The red is an incredibly evocative atmosphere.

So charged! There is a real atmosphere around it. People don't seem to approach it.

I have always found the red a difficult colour to be around. I used to have the "YES" in my bedroom - lovely atmosphere. The red, however, has alot of challenge because it is such a charged atmosphere.

I would like to use Neon on the big blank facades of city buildings, particulary Canberra. In a handwritten script, subverting the quality of neon as announcement or direction. Generally when neon is used in a city-scape, it's used to announce a place or to direct people. That whole language, the ideom, the style, could be used so that the word fitted into the city-scape in the way the words do, untill it is registered. Then it registers as something entirely different to the context that it was in.

Canberra is a unique canvas for putting neon on, as it is one of a few citys that has city size buildings, but country darkness.

Do you think there is a big difference between the commercial side, large advertising signs on buildings, and the more artistic side, one off pieces?

Yes, I would say there would always have to be. Certainly not in processes, but in intention. Because people are paying twelve to thirteen hundred dollars for a sign in their window, they obviously want maximum effect. Red is often used as it travels through the landscape the best.

Artists using neon, even city artists using it in America, are using it for a specific purpose, not maximum effect. To highlight a particular structure or facade, or to make a reference to the degradation of a particular area.

The difference seems to be announcement, direction or it can be a structural embellishment. There is a book, Neon Decoration, that focuses on neon ceilings. That sort of thing is happening more in commissioned work. For example, the big Hyatt in Melbourne. They have a phenomenal amount of concealed neon in the ceiling wells. The ceiling is stepped up and the neon sits in the cavity edge with different tones of white light around this massive area. It casts a glow on the structures above it. The tones change through the day, from blue - white in the morning to pink - white for the sunset. A very complex, effective use of neon. I think this area has a lot of scope for future development.

Neon in the eightys is beginning to be used to the potential of the medium. It is no longer just the neon sign. Neon is being used in architecture, interior lighting, as subtle highlighting and is being incorporated with other materials in artistic pieces. It is being used in galleries, as instillations and site specific commissioned work. Even the traditional commercial use is becoming more immaginative.

All this adds to the future of neon as an extreamly funtional, yet artistic medium. It will have a buzzing, glowing future.

APPENDIX ONE.

A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF THE NEON PROCESS.

The red Neon is achieved by using Neon gas in clear glass tubes. Blue is a percentage of Mercury and Argon gas.

The variations in colour are done with fluorescent powders, coated on the inside of the tube. Tubeing filters can also be used to change the colour, for example, ruby tubing can be used with flouoro powder to produce a dark red. The colour of the tube is changed by the absorbtion of the unwanted colour.

The tube is bent into the desired shape over a gas torch and electrodes are attached to each end (the electrode supplies the current to the gas within the tube). Air and impurities are extracted from the tube by a vacuum. The tube is then "bombarded". The purpose of this is basically to heat the glass and metal parts of the tube to a high temperature so that the unwanted gasses, present in the tube, are burnt out. The tube is then filled with the rare gas and permanently sealed. The Neon tube is charged by a transformer which excites the negative electrodes and positive ions. The illumination is therefore distributed evenly down the tube.

Neon is very cheap to run as it uses so little electricity, which is why it is so popular in commercial work.

The introduction of smaller transformers has opened neon up even more to artists, as it is easier to conceal them.

(For more information see the following books.)

"Let there be Neon"

Rudi Stern

1979, Published by Harry N Abrams
Inc, New York.

"Neon, - Techniques and Handling"

A handbook of Neon Sign and Cold Cathode Lighting

Samuel C Miller

1977, Sign of the Times Publishing Co.

APPENDIX TWO.

SLIDE INDEX.

Slides 1 - 3 show replicas of early neon signs, restored by Bill Livingstone.

1) Federal Matches, this sign is a good example of the artwork behind the tube, reminiscent of the thirties.

2) Kinkara Tea Time. Neon was often used to highlight objects such as clocks.

3) McWilliams Wines, Parts of this sign were animated.

Slides 4 and 5 show works by Warren Langley.

4) Coal Board Mural, Singleton, Hunter Valley, N.S.W. Glass and neon. This is an example of neon used in an architectural commission.

5) Line of Interaction, 1982. Slumped glass and neon tube. 1500 x 900 cm. This is an example of Warren Langley's early exhibition work, using the illuminated line.

Slides 6 - 9 show pieces by Neil Roberts.

6) Fracture 1, 1984. Broken glass, neon and mirrored glass. The piece was harsh and jagged during the day, but beautifully illuminated at night.

7) Fracture.2, 1984. Broken glass and neon. this piece was installed along the top of a wall at the Adelaide Arts Festival.

8) Knives and Shadows, 1984. Neon, glass and timber. Installed in the Arts Council Gallery, Gorman House, A.C.T. Purchased by the Queensland Art Gallery.

9) Gorman House Instillation, 1987. Glass, neon, copper and steel. This work sits on the exterior wall of the Arts Council Gallery and serves as a landmark.